

## I.

THE CHI-RHO CROSSES ON RAASAY: THEIR IMPORTANCE AND  
 CHRONOLOGICAL RELATIONSHIPS.<sup>1</sup> BY J. J. GALBRAITH,  
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I had the pleasure of presenting to the National Museum casts of two Chi-Rho crosses on the Island of Raasay. Drawings of them already figure in the *Proceedings* of the Society, vol. xli. p. 435, and in the *Anc. Mon. Com. Report, Skye, etc.*, Nos. 581 and 582, but photographs of the casts which bring out certain of their features more clearly are illustrated on pp. 63 and 64 of this volume.

The Pictish symbols on Stone No. 582 prove the Raasay stones to be Celtic, but the special feature of both stones is the geometric cross representing the Greek X (Chi), with the remains of the Rho attached to the right of the upper limb of the cross, the whole being a combination of the cross with the Chi-Rho symbol. This places the stones into a series of which other Scottish members are found in Galloway. Their common characteristic is the presence of the Chi-Rho symbol along with the cross, and the presence of this symbol renders them unique, and enables them to be dated, and placed in their correct relationship historically within the Celtic Church Period.

The Chi-Rho symbol grew out of a desire of the early Christians to combine the Greek initials of the name "Christ" with the symbol of the Cross. On the Reodatus Stone in Easter Ross the Lord's initials are XPI. The Chi-Rho came into use as a Christian symbol in the early decades of the third century. In A.D. 382 it became known as the sign of Constantine, and besides being Greek, it was adopted by the Greek Emperor and was accompanied by a Greek inscription "ΕΥ ΤΟΥΤΩ ΝΙΚΑ."

This does not do away with the fact that there were Cross symbols before Christ, and probably a Chi-Rho symbol before Constantine.

The symbol is found in several forms, as:—

A  $\times P$ , B  $\times \rho$ , C  $\times \rho$ , D  $\times \rho$ , E  $\rho$ , F  $\times \rho$ , G  $\times \rho$ , H  $\oplus$ , K  $\oplus$ , L  $\oplus$ , M  $\boxtimes$ .

The later forms H, K, and L are enclosed in a circle. In M, the Raasay form, the circle is replaced by a square. F may be a compound of Chi with Iota. G resembles C without the Rho.

<sup>1</sup> J. Romilly Allen, *Early Christian Symbolism*; J. Romilly Allen, *Early Christian Monuments of Scotland*; Stuart, *Sculptured Stones of Scotland*; Scott, *Pictish Church and Nation*; Scott, *Rise and Relations of the Church of Scotland*; Galbraith, "Celtic Art"; and "Some Problems of The Sculptured Monuments," *Trans. Gaelic Soc., Inverness*.

The Chi-Rho, being Greek, takes its origin in the East and can be traced across Europe from Asia Minor to Raasay. The Scottish specimens are naturally the latest, being K, Kirkmadrine; L, Whithorn; and M, Raasay. The form B is found on the Dedication Stone at Jarrow, A.D. 685, but, as a dedication cross, is later replaced by a simple equal-armed cross inside a circle. The same B form is found in the paving of Roman villas in England previous to A.D. 400. The forms B and E are found in Cornwall on stones, some of which are inscribed. The most primitive of the Scottish series is the pillar near Whithorn, No. 441, *A.H.M.*, "Wigton," L of the present series. This has the Rho attached to the right-hand edge of the vertical limb of the cross, which is curvilinear and enclosed in a circle. This most closely resembles the Raasay stones, these differing only in being enclosed in a square instead of a circle, the cross being curvilinear, incised, and in No. 582 decorated with an incised line parallel with the cross-margin. The Whithorn stone dates from the end of the fourth century, and has an inscription in debased Lombardic characters of a much later date than the cross. The Kirkmadrine stones date from the early fifth century.

The Raasay stone, No. 582, has on it the Pictish symbols of the "Tongs," "Crescent and Sceptre," both on the cross side of the stone, which is a rather unusual arrangement, but is found at Migvie, Fordoun, and Shandwick with definite Pictish symbols, as well as elsewhere in the North, though in some instances the figures are obviously symbolic though less obviously Pictish.

The historic interest of the stones lies in their association with the Brito-Celtic Church of Ninian and its point of origin at Whithorn (*Candida Casa*). The church of Raasay is a foundation of St Moluog. He is described by St Bernard, as of Bangor, in Ulster, and the founder of a hundred churches. His mission to Pictland dates from A.D. 569, and his foundations are found in Argyle, Lismore, Rosemarkie, Lewis, Pabbay in the West, as well as in the shires of Banff and Aberdeen.

The rock-cut cross, No. 581, is mentioned in Boswell's *Tour* as the place where the Macleods of Raasay practised their devotions. No. 582 is a sanctuary cross, one of a group mentioned by Dr Samuel Johnson as encircling the church of Raasay. One cross base still exists at the end of the nineteenth-century battery (not an old fort), a few yards from the rock-cut cross. Another is situated half-way up the steep hill behind the ruins of the church, while a third is probably situated among trees to the N.W. of the first. This would require excavation to make certain. The others were not identified. The rock-cut cross is situated at the point at which Dr Johnson landed, which has always been the natural landing-place for this part of the island, and I would

suggest that it commemorates the landing of St Moluog, as it is the more primitive, the other being an elaborated copy identical in general outline. This would fix the date some time between A.D. 560 and 590, when St Moluog died. This more or less exactly corresponds with its place in the series of the Scottish Chi-Rho crosses.

The survival of a type of sculptured slab in Pictland through several centuries indicates the permanence of a religious influence in this area, quite distinct from the later art of the free-standing crosses of the Ionan area, which are of later date and associated with the cult of the Ionan Church of Columba. Similarly, the series of Chi-Rho crosses immediately link up the church of St Moluog in Raasay with the church of St Ninian at Candida Casa. Much of the difficulty in classifying and dating Celtic stones has its origin in the mistaken idea that Irish Christianity and Irish art are always older than Scottish.